The Winter Evenings at Home

BY MARGARET E. SANGSTER.

EVERY day of the 365 days in the round year contains the same number of hours—twenty-four and no more. Yet, a summer day and a winter day are wholly unlike one another, and a summer evening is a very far-away cousin of a winter evening. Summer evenings are made for happy people who have no sad memories and no dull regrets. They are meant for lovers, for lingering at the gate, for a last kiss, and hand-clasp, while the moonlight bathes lawn and garden in its flood of silvery sheen. Winter evenings are for the home. We associate them with the cheer of the hearth and the bright open fire.

Darkness gathers early in winter, and the evenings are long. They give opportunity for cultivating every grace that belongs to family life. One winter night, some years ago, a man came home after an absence and a long ride over the hills and saw sitting by the fire a boy he did not know. The farm house had so large a crowd of curly heads that a boy more or less made little impression. Neighbors' children were always dropping in, and some of them stayed over night. But this boy was a stranger. The farmer made some inquiries.

"That boy," said his wife, "came here just at dusk last evening and asked the way to the nearest town. He was thinly clad and very cold, and seemed half starved, so I made him stay all night. He offered of his own accord to help milk the cows, and this morning he went out and brought in my kindling wood. He seems a nice little fellow, without a home, and I think he would better stay here."

He did stay there for the next seven years, with a place at the table, clothing, food and schooling, just as the children of that home had. The cold of the winter evening had awakened in the beginning the kindly hospitality of the household. Such virtues as generosity and unselfishness flourish in the country.

When the long evenings come one of the vital needs is to make them agreeable and cheerful for all within doors. Nobody should be left out of the tender amenities of the home circle. Boys from 15 to 18 have often reached a restless stage in their development, when they are very apt to slip away from home if it be gloomy or frigid or in any way wearisome. Of all mistaken economies that which is too frugal of lamplight in the winter evenings is the most deplorable. Save somewhere else if you must, but have plenty of light. The living-room should be well lighted and warm lighted, but the boy or girl who prefers to spend part of the evening in a separate room should have the chance to do so with a shaded lamp and sufficient warmth to make the room pleasant.

Sociability among neighbors belongs to those long evenings, and to promote sociability there should be music and games and informal conversation, as well as something simple in the way of refreshment. A chafing-dish should be a family convenience, and every home should have its well-filled cake box and a good store of nuts and apples free to all.

There are people who pride themselves on being unsociable, who say that they have no fitness for life outside their families. The narrowest woman I ever knew, the woman who was least sympathetic and least attractive, though beautiful in person and highly educated, had cultivated in herself an indifference to other people and a reluctance to leave her own home, that made her in middle life a pure petrifaction. There is such a thing as being too domestic, too exclusive, and while the long evenings give great scope to domesticity they also give a splendid chance for sociability.

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I suppose everyone knows that we may form any habit we choose, a habit of being well-mannered and hospitable, or a habit of being churlish and niggardly. A thoughtful writer has said that persons who mean to grow must make automatic and habitual as many useful habits as they can. "Down among the nerve cells and fibers the molecules are counting, registering and storing up our time to be used for good or ill when opportunity comes. Nothing we ever do is, in strict scientific literalness, wiped out. Of course, this has its good side as well as its bad one. If we become permanent drunkards by so many separate drinks, so we may become saints in the moral, authorities and experts in the practical and scientific spheres, by so many separate acts and hours of work."

What I wish to emphasize is that we may form habits of application to study, of kind greeting to friends, and of knowing how to have a good time in the long evenings, if we seriously determine to put them to some good use. It will be the greatest of pities if we let the winter drift by without getting from it both pleasure and profit. It is the period when the home lines may be most closely drawn, and when we may have the most healthful fun and enjoyment beyond our homes.

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I wish some word of mine could be influential in bringing about one urgently needed reform. In our cities the hours for social gatherings of every kind are growing absurdly late. People come together at an hour when their grandfathers were going to bed. They leave the festive scene not at midnight, but in the gray of the early dawn. Young men who should take clear heads and untired muscles to business the next day are unfitted for duty by the pleasure verging on dissipation of the night before. The season's wear and tear tells hardly upon the bloom of our girls. A round of teas, receptions, theatre parties and dances, brings nervous prostration to young women, who should never so much as hear of anything beyond healthy fatigue. Our late hours rob the long evenings of their charm, menace our vitality and are really a blow at the well being of the community. The effort should be made to get together earlier and to separate at a reasonable time. The arbitration of this is in the hands, not of men, but of women, who are the true social queens, who in this country, manage everything that has to do with home and friendship, and who may, if they like, make it the fashion to live more simply, and with less display than is at present the custom. Any lions in the way may be easily overcome if women are in earnest in the strife for improvement.

Another urgently needed reform is in the line of expenditure. There is no reason why our pleasures should cost so much as they too often do. Because we can afford to spend little, some of us decline to be hospitable at all. Yet there have been in New York and in other cities, gatherings of refined and agreeable people, evening after evening in the winters of the past, where the only refreshment offered was a wafer and a cup of tea, and where there was no display, either of dress, of costly catering, or of riotous luxury in American beauty roses. Republican simplicity should be a characteristic of our hospitality when we dispense it in the long evenings. There is the most winsome attraction in the cordial greeting, in the showing by voice and eye and hand that the home is glad in its heart beat when friends come in of an evening.

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WITCH HAZEL.

BY HARRIET L. KEELER.

Through the gray and sombre wood,
Against the dusk of fir and pine,
Last of their floral sisterhood
The hazel's yellow blossoms shine.
—John G. Whittier.

THIS shrubby little tree is one of the most curious and interesting plants of our northern flora. When all other trees are making ready for winter, when its own leaves are yellow and falling, it bursts forth into abundant bloom. The clusters of tiny yellow flowers crowd upon a branch already laden with the ripe nutlets of last year's blossoms, and wave in beauty throughout the entire month of November. It is not uncommon to see a tree absolutely destitute of every leaf and at the same time every twig fairly yellow with bloom. The flower buds appear in August, rarely they expand in September, normally in October and November; the flowers appear three or four together on a short, brown, downy pedicel in the axil of a falling or fallen leaf.

The flower is in fours, four lobes to the calyx; four long, narrow crumpled yellow petals; four fertile stamens alternating with four scale-like imperfect ones; only the pistil varies from the four-fold plan; the ovary is two-celled and two styled.

Although the flowers appear in October no growth takes place in the ovary until the following spring, and the ripening period is not forwarded thereby. It is not plain that the plant is in the least benefited by this variation from the normal time of flowering.

An interesting peculiarity of the fruit is the way the tiny nuts are discharged from their woody pods. As the pod bursts the contraction of its edges presses upon the enclosed seeds and causes them to fly to a distance of several feet. Bring home in November a fruiting spray and place it upon the table; no sooner has the warmth of the room dried the tiny capsules than the miniature bombardment will begin and will continue until every seed is forced out of its covering.

The name "witch" seems to be responsible for the desire of those persons who claim to be able to locate hidden springs, to use the twigs of this bush as divining rods. But the name is harmless enough. It is a case of confounding two words that sound alike and giving to one the meaning of the other. Witch is a modern spelling of the Saxon wich or wych, which is believed to mean moist places; and the value of the adjective when applied to a plant seems to mean that the plant naturally grows in moist places, not that there is anything immoral in the plant's character; others think wich means weak, straggling.

Witch Hazel.

The bark and leaves of the witch hazel are reputed to possess medicinal properties on account of the tradition that they were used by the Indians in the treatment of external inflammations. Pond's Extract is a distillation of the bark in dilute alcohol. This remedy has great popularity, but chemists so far have failed to distinguish any active medicinal properties in the plant.

There are not many witch hazels in the world. So far only three species have been discovered; one in North America, one in China, and one in Japan. Our witch hazel is to be looked for in deep ravines and shaded hillsides and at the edge of woodlands.

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Preparation for Thanksgiving.

BY CORNELIA C. BEDFORD.

WITH Thanksgiving near at hand it is necessary for the housewife to make a certain amount of preparation for that day and the Christmas holidays, even though no great amount of entertaining is contemplated. There is mincemeat to be made in quantity for pies, enough plum pudding to last through the winter and fruit cake for expected and unexpected occasions, for these three articles improve with age when properly made and cared for; besides these there are the cookie and doughnut pots to be filled, and perhaps, if in the country, the matter can be arranged with the farmer who brings us eggs and butter the Thanksgiving turkey to be selected and directions given for fattening and killing. Let us begin with the mincemeat, for which several recipes are given that those who like liquors and those who decline to use them may be provided for.

Mincemeat—(1) Take two pounds and a half of lean beef from the top of the round; wipe, cover with boiling water, add one-half teaspoonful of salt, cover closely and simmer for an hour and a half. Set aside until next day, then take the meat from the liquor (which may be used for soup or gravy) and chop it fine. From a pound of firm kidney suet remove membrane and put it through the food chopper, keeping it as cold as possible that it may remain fine and powdery. Seed and halve two pounds of raisins; pick over, wash and dry one pound of seedless raisins and two pounds of currants; cut fine three-quarters of a pound of citron, peel, core and chop enough tart apples to weigh five pounds. Mix all together, adding two pounds of brown sugar, one tablespoonful of salt, one teaspoonful of grated nutmeg, three teaspoonfuls each of allspice, cloves and mace and two tablespoonfuls of cinnamon. Stir in one pint of the best brandy and one quart of sherry, mix thoroughly and pack away in jars with tightly-fitting covers.

Mincemeat—(2) Put through the food chopper three pounds and a half of cooked lean beef and one pound and a half of beef suet from which the membranes have been removed. Pare, core and chop in a wooden tray enough tart

Continued on Page 8.